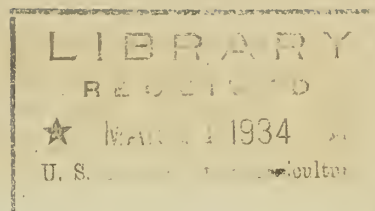


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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Informative Labels on Fabrics



A radio talk by Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Tuesday, March 6, 1934.

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MR. SALISBURY: Now for the Household Calendar, with Miss Van Deman of the Bureau of Home Economics presiding as usual. Are you going to give us more on vitamins today?

MISS VAN DEMAN: No, Mr. Salisbury, I'm going to leave the vitamin alphabet to take care of itself for a while. Today I'm going to be downright feminine. I'm going to talk about spring clothes, or at least some of the new spring fabrics that everybody's interested in these days.

The other day, I made a shopping tour. The stores were crowded even though the rain was pouring down. It was a nice warm spring rain though, a pleasant change from the snow and zero temperatures we've been having. Everywhere I found the dress goods departments full. Women were milling all around looking at the new spring silks, and cottons, and rayons.

One of the things that interested me most was the labels, or the lack of them, giving real information about the quality of the materials. There are so many new fabrics appearing all the time, and so many tricky new names for the old ones that I'm constantly on the look out for tags or selvage marks or any scrap of printed information that will tell me what service I may expect from these fabrics.

In the silk department of one store I saw something that pleased me so much I went up and complimented the management. All the silks on sale in that store are definitely labeled as pure dye or weighted. Right on the placards with the prices in good-sized letters are the words "pure dye" or "weighted." If any woman buys silks in that store and doesn't know whether she's getting an all-silk fabric or one weighted with a lot of metallic salts, it's nobody's fault but her own because she doesn't read the signs. Up to this time even when I've bought silk at that reliable store, I've always taken home samples first and burnt a piece. That's the sure test, you know, to find out whether a silk is all silk or whether it is loaded with metallic salts that give a false impression of quality. You can be pretty sure that the fabric is all silk if the sample burns up completely when you touch a match to it, and if as it burns the ash curls up in a little ball and the smoke has the odor of burning feathers. If you've ever burned a sample of weighted silk, then you know it acts very differently. The silk burns right away and leaves a black ash almost the exact shape and size of the original sample. What you have left is the metallic weighting.

Of course, pure silk is expensive, and we all like the shimmer and feel of silk so much that the silk worms just can't spin fast enough to keep up with our demands. So manufacturers took to this practice of using a little silk fiber and weighting it with tin salts. This way they can make a silky looking fabric to

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sell at an astonishingly low price. But, of course, the trouble is that these weighted silks haven't the wearing quality of the pure-dye goods. We've all been gypped by them -- had them split after a few wearings or even go to pieces hanging up in the closet. These weighted silks are also hard to clean. You can't press the wrinkles out easily.

This silk situation reached such a bad pass that in 1932 the manufacturers held a conference under the auspices of the Federal Trade Commission. They adopted a trade agreement, designed to protect the consumer and the manufacturer of quality silks. Here's the gist of that agreement. They defined a pure-dye silk as one that contains no more than 10 percent of any fiber or substances other than silk. Black silks are the one exception. They may contain as much as 15 percent of other fibers or substances and yet be called "pure dye." Also under this same agreement, if the manufacturer wants to use the word "silk" on his label and his fabric contains more of other substances than the 10 and 15 percent allowed, then he must call it "weighted silk."

This trade agreement on labeling silk is carried out in different ways by different manufacturers. I've recently noticed some gold and silver tags on bolts of silk goods. The gold tag reads "all pure silk" and the silver one says, "pure silk weighted". The words pure silk on this silver label mean of course that the fabric is all silk and not a mixture of silk and other fibers. And the word weighted after pure silk means that the fabric contains metallic salts or other kinds of weighting material.

It's up to us consumers, I believe, to keep on the watch for all informative labels of this kind, not only on silk but on other fabrics. Next time, I'll tell you about some that I found on cottons and on rayons. Some dress manufacturers are also putting labels about the quality of the fabric on their ready-to-wear garments. That's certainly a great help to the consumer also.

Well next time, we'll talk about cotton fabrics.

Goodbye, for this time.